

John Cage and Merce Cunningham visited Black Mountain College in April.

John Cage composes music. He is a young man and he writes music for the piano transformed into a combination of percussive sound and tone. This transformation is brought about by the insertion of a certain number of bolts, screws, and leather scraps into the piano. He played for the college community a program of sixteen sonatas and four interludes, the work largely of the last two years. After the program, and after coffee in the community house, John Cage answered the questions of those who wondered what he meant to be doing and why he was doing it. He suggested that he was interested more in time than in harmonics. His music is structured according to duration in time, every smaller unit of a large composition reflecting as a microcosm the features of the whole. He said that he felt that the highest use of music was like that of anything a man "makes": to integrate a man's total faculties through the order of the composition. Primarily the work performs this function for its creator, but the nice thing about "art" (anything a man "makes") is that it may have the same power for another—a creative performer or audience. And, since integration may recognize itself in a stranger, a new society may one day slowly take shape out of the present schizophrenia through our self-won coordination. It begins with music and ends with a common human nature.

Or, say, with the dance. Merce Cunningham is a dancer, composing, performing, teaching. Like Cage his interest is now mainly in time, movement in time, rather than poses. Cunningham and Cage work together, or perhaps one should say separately. Actually they work out the dance and music separately after having agreed upon a rhythmic structure. This permits freedom of invention equally, within known limits, and prevents the conventional synchronization of gesture and tone. Merce Cunningham gave for the community a program of dance exercises and dance compositions. It was a very beautiful and powerful expression of spiritual concentration manifested in movement. He also worked with students while he was here.

Consonant with their humility before the act of making something orderly and expressive of a total human being, these two artists made little of their biographies. Somehow they were both at one time students at the Cornish School in Seattle. After that, John Cage travelled in Europe, studied with Schoenberg and in California with Cowell. Merce Cunningham danced with Martha Graham for six years, and then he moved into independent work. They are at present on tour, meeting invitations extended to them in Chicago, Wisconsin, Los Angeles, San Francisco. They will return to Black Mountain College for the summer session.

The current of creative energy since their visit has illuminated the college both in creation and in response.